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UNION OFFICIALS CHICKEN OUT!

The Trades Council quite rightly condemned the threat last month to workers employed building the new Kentucky Fried Chicken branch in Ferryquay Street.

However, now that the premises are open it's worth referring to the point made in the Trades Council statement about the wages and conditions on offer to workers from this multi-national company.

The council asked whether the workers would get the agreed industry-wide rate of £2.69 an hour, whether they would have secure terms of employment and be allowed to join a union.

What has happened is that the workers are NOT being paid the rate, are NOT in a union and do NOT have security of employment. Of course Kentucky Fried Chicken is by no means the only firm which has been allowed by the trade union officials to move in and set up in Derry using low-paid, non-union labour.

Indeed, the most common thing said by local workers about the trade union officials is that they're "useless".

For example, there are shirt factories in Derry where the shop stewards have to ask the personnel officer to phone their full-time official when they have a problem. The full-time official in question accepts this arrangement, with the result that the workers are in no position to object. This is like soldiers in a war having to ask the enemy to contact their officers for them!

Union officials won't lift a finger over the scandal of ACE workers being used on building jobs, such as those run by the so-called Inner City Trust, doing skilled men's work for less than labourers' pay and being thrown back on the dole after a year.

At Du Pont since the strike which was effectively sold out last year, the unions are allowing the management to walk all over them. The rank and file workers don't feel they can put up any fight because they don't feel confident they will have any union backing.

We could go on and on. The point is that one of the reasons few people take the working-class movement seriously is that the movement's "officers" - the full time officials - see themselves not as the leaders of the workers' side but as go-betweens between the workers and the bosses. And frequently, in their wages, status and in the general way they see themselves they are closer to the management types they are dealing with than they are to their own members.

This is why the Socialist Workers' Movement campaigns for all trade union officials to be elected by the members, not appointed by higher officials, and to be paid the average wage of the workers they represent. We are also in favour of pressure being put on the officials now to force them to take a stand on immendiate issues.

For example: it wouldn't be beyond the capacity of the ATGWU to recruit the Kentucky Fried workers, and then set about winning them trade union conditions by whatever means are necessary. And that might be a good pointer for other catering firms in the town.

The unions could tell Paddy Doherty and the rest of them that if the Inner City Trust intends to go ahead with the major scheme in Butcher Street, it will be on the basis of union labour, union rates and proper conditions - otherwise there'll be bother.

This won't happen unless pressure goes on within the unions. The SWM urges rank and file trade unionists to get along to their union meetings and demand that the officials start putting up a bit of a fight on these and other issues.

Cold soup in the dark

The second rise in the price of electricity within a year must be condemned as yet another attack against a community continually savaged by the policies of a government working only for the rich at the cost of the poor.

The Electricity Bill is the government's biggest privatisation measure, and despite claims otherwise by the junior energy minister, Micheael Spicer, the price increase is undoubtedly aimed at softening up the consumer for further increases after the sale, and enchancing the industry's appeal to investors.

There are, of course, no corresponding increases in benefits to help people cope with another rise in the cost of living. The already very real threat of hypothermia will hang ever more heavily over pensioners in the colder months, and with the general tightening up of the whole benefit system, it'll be those least able to cope who will be hit hardest.

Northern Ireland, despite its widespread long term unemployment and low wages, suffers the highest electricity prices in the UK and the increase can only represent a further measure of oppression against the working class, a deepening of the division between the rich and the poor.

Catholic and Protestant capitalists unite!

Posters for the SWM meeting in the Union Hall on 11 April seemd to cause a fair bit of comment around the town.
A number of people thought that the theme of the meeting - "Will Catholic and Protestant workers ever unite?" - was naive.
"Everybody knows that Catholics and Protestants in the Six Counties are totally divided, they'll never unite", was the thrust of many remarks.
How pleasant it is, then, to be able to record an example of Catholics and Protestants here in Derry getting together in total friendship to further the interests of their class.
We refer, of course, to the business class, which once again has had no problem speaking with a single voice on the threat to their profits posed by the RUC barriers in Spencer Road.
Some of these people may be hundred-percenters when it comes to a united Ireland. Others may be so loyal they wear a sash under their vests 365 days a year. But when their bank balances are involved they can talk in perfect harmony on Radio Foyle programmes all week long.
And about a security matter, too!!!
Why does this happen? A clue was provided in the "Journal" of 4 April, where Luke Hasson of Austin's was arguing that Strand Road traders shouldn't object to the city-centre pedestrianisation scheme. Give it time and it will help you rake in an extra £100 million a year, he reckoned.
A hundred million quid! This is an awful lot of readies. . .
Since there's only about fifty traders in the Strand Road area affected by the scheme, Hasson seems to be saying that it will increase their turn-overs by an average of £2 million each!
That gives us some idea of why it is that the business class can unite so easily across the sectarian barrier on issues like the security barriers. The amounts of money involved are big enough to ensure that PROFIT will loom larger in their minds than any other consideration. So they understand that it's in their interest to stick together as a class.
At the same time the dominance of their class is guaranteed by the fact that OUR class is NOT united in its interest.
This is the way of the capitalist world. And until workers unite to overturn the capitalist world there'll be no change in the way of it

Another jobs "initiative"

The latest "initiative" is the creation of an Employment Task Force. This sparked off no end of excitement at the last meeting of the City Council.
The idea behind the Employment Task Force is of a group which would co-ordinate the resources of the existing agencies in the field of job creation so as to identify the employment opportunities in the area and work out a means of filling them.
The people behind this idea must know full well that in practical terms the "task force" will be unable to do anything which is not being done already by the IDB, the LEDU and all the rest of the alphabet soup of "agencies", "projects" and so forth that we already have in this town.
There has been massive unemployment in the Derry area since anybody can remember. The official figure at present stands at 29 percent, around 10 000 people, and rising.
It's perfectly obvious that no "task force" is going to come up with any scheme which nobody has thought of before and which will make a serious dent in the problem. There will have to be fundamental political and economic change before mass unemployment in Derry is a thing of the past. That's not being "fatalistic", it's just facing the fact of the matter.
If all the energy which goes into this sort of thing was to be put into building a real political challenge to the capitalist system which has created this mass unemployment we might begin to get somewhere. We are going to get nowhere playacting about "task-forces".

RUC worry toddlers

The RUC is becoming terribly worried about the dangers to youngsters out playing in Derry streets.
Last month the Strand Road copshop had a statement out warning parents about the potential for tragedy in toddlers playing with toy guns. Nervy police officers might easily mistake them for "terrorists", it was suggested.
Then there was a warning that "Neighbours" fans showing off on their skateboards might be hit by RUC landrovers rushing to an "incident'.
The RUC's solution was that toy guns and skateboards should be taken away from the little children.
Would it not be far simpler if the police chiefs ordered their underlings not to be killing any wains they see playing cowboys and indians and not to be driving up onto the pavements to crush skateboarders to death?

SWM Branch Meetings

Tuesday 11 April WILL CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT WORKERS EVER UNITE?
As loyalist murder gangs resume their killing of catholics, simply because they ARE catholics, it's understandable that many people think working class unity is impossible. LINDA MOORE of Belfast SWM argues that Catholic and Protestant workers have come together in the past in defence of their class interests, and will do so again. But how can this unity on economic issues be extended to the political arena? COME ALONG AT 8.00pm to UNION HALL, SHIPQUAY STREET.

Tuesday 18 April IRAN AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM
The Salman Rushdie affair has exposed how deeply reactionary the Iranian regime is. But just tem years ago, when the Shah was overthrown by revolution in Iran, a very different kind of society seemed possible. CATHERINE KEARNE Of Dublin SWM looks at Iran then, and now.
8.00pm DUNGLOE BAR, WATERLOO STREET.

Tuesday 25 April GORBACHEV'S RUSSIA - A SECOND REVOLUTION?
What's going on in Russia? Is Gorbachev trying to advance the rights of workers there or is he about the same kind of "reconstruction" that Thatcher, Haughey, Reagan and Bush have been about? JULIE WATERSON of the SWP in Britain argues that Russia does need another revolution . . . but that it will have to come from below, not from the likes of Gorbachev.
8.00pm UNION HALL, SHIPQUAY STREET.

Tuesday 3 May ART AND REVOLUTION
Should art serve the needs of the revolution? Is it possible for cultural activities to bring working class revolution nearer? Can there be genuine working class culture in a society dominated by the ideas of our rulers? COLIN DARKE answers these and many more questions at 8.00pm in the DUNGLOE BAR, WATERLOO STREET.